

John 1:1-14 "Why "The Word?""

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[0 : 00] We begin to look at John 1. Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, sometimes we just like things tight and cut and dry, just the facts, ma'am, but we know, Father, that you both want us to give us truth, but you would like us to be like Mary and ponder things in our hearts. And so, Father, we ask that you would help us to ponder your word this morning, not just this morning, but in other times throughout the days and weeks and months ahead, that we would be like Mary and ponder your word. So, Father, may your Holy Spirit help us to ponder and wonder. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Just, I don't know how many of you, probably all of you know who Jordan Peterson is, and he just put out some videos in the last couple of months on the Gospels. He sort of sits at the center of a table with eight brainiacs, all of them having probably double my IQ and a hundred times more knowledge than me. And one of the things that they talked about was John 1, 1 to 14. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made, and on and on and on, till the crescendo, which is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And the ep, I only watched part of it, I read, I watched maybe about a third of it, and it begins with Dennis Prager, whom if you're not familiar with him, he's a Jewish public intellectual. And he begins by saying, what's with the Word? Like, I never got my mind around that. Why on earth would they pick such a weird, odd phrase as the Word? Can somebody help me understand why they would pick such an odd way of talking about Jesus? And these brainiacs being brainiacs, you'd be surprised at all the things they get out of that. But I think it's sort of a bit of a simpler thing. One of the things I think connected all of their thought is that this phrase, the Word in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, that whole thing. I think one of the things that they approach it as is that it's almost as if it's a bug that needs to be fixed. And as I'm listening to them talk, for the first time it struck me, because every year I have to preach on this, and I puzzle over it a lot. And I realized, one moment, if God is the author of Scripture, the ultimate author of Scripture, then this can't possibly be a bug that we have to fix. It's obviously a feature. And I should look at it as not as a bug that I need to fix, but a feature that I need to ponder. And so let's just go back to this whole thing about whether or not we're being visited by UFOs.

[3 : 00] And as many WAGs have said, why UFOs would pick New Jersey to visit out of all of the places on Earth, that's of course a whole other question. But it's very interesting. All they need to have, people have to have, are some unexplained lights in the sky. And they're not even inherently unexplainable, because it could be done by drones and a whole pile of other things. And people start to wonder whether there's life, human, not in human life, intelligent life beyond our world.

And if we think about it for a second, maybe we can start to get a little bit of an idea about why it is that God chose the word, the word. This is just me pondering why he chose the word, why this is a feature of the Bible, not a bug that has to be fixed. And one of the first things is that if you think about it, if just mere flashing lights communicates that there might be intelligent life somewhere else in the world, and that's not even very unexplainable, just think of all of the other types of things that if we see them, we understand, human beings understand the difference between just things that happen randomly by nature and things that come from a human mind or human intelligence. So for instance, if you could put up the Inuksuk, Claire, that would be very helpful.

So imagine that you're out camping or canoeing in the wilderness, and you have a terrible canoeing accident or whatever, and you get off onto the shore. And if you see something like this, nobody will say, wow, I wonder what type of explosion caused that. Like nobody would think that. Like not one

single human being would think. In fact, if you were with a buddy and you've both climbed out of the canoe, you're freezing to death, and you come and you climb off the shore, and your buddy said, come on, you say, come on, you have hypothermia. Like, you know, that's obviously a human being did it. And if it was all covered with moss, you'd feel a bit depressed because that means it's been there a long time. But if it looks like it was just freshly put there, what would happen? You'd have a feeling of excitement. Good grief. There must be a human being nearby or who comes by here. And that would give you some type of sensor or excitement. There's a... I forgot. I should have written it down. John Sanford wrote a science fiction novel a few years ago. And I'm going to talk about this a little bit more this coming Sunday when I talk about the Magi. But one of the things in the science fiction book is that astronomers are watching stars and everything that lights in the sky. And the astronomers note what looks like a comet that they haven't seen before. And that shows you, well, you know, it's sort of interesting who's going to be the first one to record it. They have that little bit of professional, you know, ego and everything. But all of a sudden, the light stops and stays in one spot. And as soon as that happens, a chill goes down the spine of every astronomer. [6:03] Nothing in nature stops. This is obviously a very large spaceship. There's obviously intelligent life which is out there. God has given scientists a natural word. But very few scientists have gone to understand that if there's this natural word or natural meaning, then obviously there must be some type of God who does exist. And I'm referring to DNA, which has now been known to be for about 70 some odd years. And DNA is basically coding to the coding required for a cell to replicate and make a human being. It's clearly a message. It's clearly information. It's clearly instructions. It's clearly like a word. And yet it says something about the hardness of human hearts that if we see a word like that, we don't go to think that there must be something that exists that could create such a message that's more than just us. So one of the things which I think is interesting about this phrase of the word is if you go to the end of John's gospel, he tells you why he writes the gospel.

Like, you don't have to try to guess. He tells you, I want to tell you about just some of the things. If I was to try to write all the things that Jesus did, boy, you know, it would take millions of books. But I wrote this. Why? So you would come to know Jesus and believe and trust in him. That's why he writes the book. And he writes it as a pastor, and he writes it as a missiologist, so to speak. He's already been familiar with lots of different cultures, lots of different religions, and he's intentionally writing something that will be able to speak to many, many cultures in many, many times so that people will come to know Jesus. And this very, very first thing is when you see even in anukshuk, you know person. When you see a word, you know a person, you know intelligence, you know meaning. And that's how he begins his gospel. We Christians don't understand entirely how weird we are. And especially, I think, maybe under the pressure of Islam and atheism in North America, Christians are a little bit almost embarrassed about the Trinity. I know a lot of ministers who feel hesitant to even mention it very much in their sermons. They prefer to just keep talking about, you know, Jesus or God the Father or God the Holy Spirit, never really trying to talk about the fact that we Christians believe there's just one God who exists in three persons, the triune God. But, you know, the Trinity is one of those doctrines that we should rejoice in, we should exult in. It is only the Trinity explains so many human experiences and longings. Only the Trinity makes sense of the Bible. So it sounds odd to us to say that only the Trinity makes sense of human experience, but it really does.

And it helps us as well to understand a little bit about why John, very brilliantly under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And whether it was him or whether or not this is, in fact, just something that Jesus used to muse on while they're walking these long, dusty roads. Like, you know, it'd be really fat. Maybe in heaven we'll find out whether, as the disciples were walking in the heat. If you've ever been to, I think the last, I've been to Israel several times. Not the last time, but the time before that it was 40 degrees, but it's a dry heat. Some of you might be used to playing places where it's 40 degrees. And so actually it was sort of interesting because if there was a really nice breeze and you were in the shade, you could actually feel a bit cool. Because when I was there, I didn't want to spend all my time inside cafes. I wanted to be out where I could sort of people watch and all of that type of stuff and enjoy Jerusalem. And why was I saying? Oh, yes. So one of the things which is so interesting about this phrase, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness is not overcoming. So what's interesting about this phrase, the Word, is this. How is John going to try to communicate? How are Christians going to communicate to the peoples of the world what the true God is really like? Well, this really is helpful. So

[10:41] John is having to speak to pagans, and pagans believe that there are many gods. And if, in fact, there's a, you know, if you go back and you read the story in Acts 17, where Paul is trying to communicate the truth about Jesus and the truth about the resurrection, the people who are, oh, not, it's not, it's not Athens, it's, it's in Acts 14, not Acts 17. But the people who hear him think he's talking about two gods, a male god named Jesus and a female god named resurrection. And they just plug that into their mental system and think that he's talking about two gods. So what is one way that you're going to try to communicate that that's not the way, that that's a completely wrong way to think about God? Well, one of the things is if he began by saying there's three persons in the Trinity or something like that, it would just, it'd end up just thinking there's three gods, sort of like what Mormons think, that there's, you know, a literal father, a literal son, and a little Holy Spirit somewhere up in heaven. So instead he uses this fascinating thing of saying in the beginning was the Word.

Now they would have all scratched their heads, just like Dennis Prager and John and Jordan Peterson and all the brainiacs scratched their head at this. But it's obviously something which is non-physical that has to do with something more like spiritual. But he didn't use the word spiritual, what might end up thinking that there's like three spirits up there. They use this puzzling word that puts everybody a step back and they have to scratch their head and ponder about it as he's trying to communicate.

And even that phrase in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word and the Word was with God is in Greek a word, that word with is a word that's only used when it talks about two people being together. So in other words, if I said that I was, you know, off camping with my car, in Greek you would say with differently than if I said I was with Louise. The two words are different. And the word for two persons is what's used there in Greek, which is very, very fascinating, isn't it, if you think about it for a second. And so on one hand there he's communicating to pagans that the God who really exists is very different than your categories. And for those who come from the East, from Buddhism and from Hinduism, where, you know, at the end of the day there's just the one. We came from the one, there's some tragedy, human beings are a tragic mistake, tragic error, and our destiny is once again to be with the one.

Well, here's the whole thing about words, is words imply another person. You have a word, you know, from one to another. That implies a second person. So it's all of a sudden saying to people from a more Eastern background, one moment, that's not describing the one word and with, it's describing as if there's some type of communication which is going on even before there's human beings.

[13:35] And of course, for our Muslim friends, they have a profound problem because if there's only Allah, why would Allah ever speak? Who would he speak to? Why would he need words? There's nobody other than him.

And if there are words, it has to just be sort of like some weird thing because he wants people to serve him or some creatures to serve him. So he sort of thinks, oh, maybe I'll invent words. Whereas the whole idea in the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God, that can only make sense if in fact God is something like the Trinity. And once again, this all fits in with human experience because the fact of the matter is, is that words are unbelievably important to us.

When we have a loved one who sinks into Alzheimer's to such an extent that they can no longer speak to us, we experience a profound loss. When we have a loved one who goes into a coma that we can't speak to them, we experience a profound loss. Words are essential to human beings. Bit of an aside, I've told you this story before, but what the heck, it's Christmas. Christmas is for old men telling old stories time and time and time again. I look back now on how my son Tosh, I was with my son Tosh, and I wish I could rewind it. I'm the type of person, when I wake up in the morning, don't talk to me for half an hour, okay? I just sort of stumble into the bathroom, stumble over to the coffee maker, stumble over to the toaster, start to have some toast and peanut butter, start to have my coffee, and after about 20 minutes to half an hour, I'm fit to talk to a human being. My son Tosh, it was almost as if he slept for nine hours, the moment he wakes up, he has to catch

up on not speaking for nine hours.

He has to speak constantly, so he would get up and go, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, all excited and happy, and I'm just thinking, you know, whatever. I wasn't the best dad. That's one of those things I wish I could go back, although he turned out like a nice guy, and he still likes me, so that's one of the wonders of fatherhood or whatever. But words are so unbelievably important. It's so brilliant, something for us to ponder, that John begins to tell us about Jesus by talking about the Trinity of all things, and by talking about words. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him, to get the point, nothing was made that was made without him. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And then later on, of course, the wonderful phrase, in the beginning, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory is the only Son from the Father, full, of grace and truth. Human beings are really weird. We don't appreciate just how vastly weird we are.

How is it that Bach can exist in the same universe as Hitler? How could the glories of the music that he composed exist in a world which also has Auschwitz? How is it that you can have marriages where at one moment the husband might say something unbelievably loving, perceptive and loving and moving to his wife, and then an hour later say something which is deeply cutting and wounds her for decades? How is it that human beings are like that? Like secular thought, moralistic thought tends to push us to either be very idealistic, you know, about our inner good child, which is what we really are like, or it ends up being like in zombie movies and apocalyptic movies where it's almost as if you have to fear human beings more than the zombies because it shows the unbelievable cruelty and evil in human beings.

[17:29] But usually those two things don't happen in the same movie, at least not in any type of way that tries to meditate upon how it is that human beings can be so radically different.

Now this very brilliant story, I'm going to read it again, it captures this, only Christianity captures the riddle of the mystery of human beings and can begin to unlock it. Only Christianity does that.

Listen to the John's Gospel again, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. But here all of a sudden we get the hint, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Why is it that human beings, on one hand you can say there's a light in them, but you can also say at the same time that there's a darkness in them? How is it that both can exist? Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, the difference between good and evil doesn't come between tribes or classes or nations or even people.

[18:36] The difference between good and evil runs right down the center of every human being. In a sense, every human being has something which is very much light, but also something which is very much dark. What a weird creature men and women are, human beings are.

And the Torah continues, verse 6, There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. Now it's talking about Jesus. He was in the world, this is Jesus, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

How is it that human beings, how is it that men can know something so profound about their wife, and yet at the same time, in the next breath, be so completely and utterly clueless? How is it that a mom can be like that about her daughter?

On one hand, having this profound insight about her daughter, and the next minute, being completely and utterly clueless. On one moment, wanting her daughter to thrive, and on the next moment, wanting her daughter to do the things that she wants her daughter to do.

[19:40] How is it that human beings can be that at the same time? That's a profound mystery. Verse 11, Jesus came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory, as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. See, here's one of the things which is about this text.

The text is very clear that there's a type of light and darkness within human beings. And if you realize that for a second, that no amount of light in a human being ever gets rid of the darkness, although it does seem as if there are human beings where the darkness does swallow the light, and they are as close to being perfectly evil as you shudder to imagine.

And unfortunately, there are people like that who have wandered the earth and still wander the earth today. And it's for that reason that we have to hope that we always have police and armies and be on our guard and everything.

Just this past week, just a week ago Friday, I was in a downtown Starbucks, and all of a sudden, it didn't make it into the news, about 15 tweens and then a whole pile of adults, like about 10 tweens and about 10 adults, all came rushing into the coffee shop, all yelling, there's a man with a knife, there's a man with a knife, shut the doors, lock the doors.

[21 : 08] There was a man with a big knife out doing threatening actions on Bank Street. They all rushed into the store, and the doors was locked, because, you know, you don't want a guy like that in.

And he wandered away, I don't know, the police never caught him, and I guess he didn't do anything bad, thanks be to God. But why is it that there is this difference within human beings? And so the Bible here is very frank about it, and the Bible here is also saying something as well about human beings, which is quite profound.

It is only from Christianity that we understand the worth and dignity of human beings. Our culture is losing its Christian heritage, and so that's why we now have things like, well, MAID, which, as I've said before, you know, medically assisted, medically assisted, or medical aid in dying or something like that.

That's what it stands for, right? Well, that sounds something good. That's not what it is. It's just doctors killing you, by the way. It should really be called scalp, right? Socially condoned administration of lethal poison.

Everybody likes a maid. Nobody wants to be scalped. So maybe one of the things, we should create a revolution to change the name and say you want the government to scalp you. Maybe it will slow things down if we use that type of language.

[22 : 21] But the very fact that God, the Son of God, could take into himself human nature says that there is something profoundly important and of great dignity and great uniqueness about human beings.

That a human being is not a chimp, not a dog, not a bug. Only human beings are created in such a way that God, the Son of God, and it's not a matter that God squeezed himself really, really tightly and stuck himself inside a human being.

But that human being, the human nature is taken up into God. And that says there's something very profound about human beings. But now we've got to talk about glory.

What does glory mean? Our gospel text, in some ways, if you want to ponder Christmas, I was thinking about that as I was driving in this morning.

Maybe what I'll talk about next year when I try to talk about biblical Christmas to any non-Christian, any person outside the Christian faith who asks me, I'll say it's a day for Christians to rejoice in and meditate upon.

[23 : 27] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. That's what Christmas is, that's what Christmas is, a day to ponder, to remember, to rejoice, to embrace this profound truth.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. You know, the wonderful thing about the book of John is that it begins with glory, and it's a major theme throughout it.

And, you know, when we think of glory, we think of some of those, you know, spectacular things that we've just seen of nature. Sometimes, maybe we'll think, if you're a very urban type of person, you'll think of one of those wonderful urban scapes, seeing a city, especially at night, with all of its lights, and we think of glory in those types of ways.

And those are all completely good ways to think of glory. I'm not saying that they're wrong. But John's Gospel isn't referring to glory. Glory is like a bit of a riddle that you don't discover until close to the very end, just before Jesus is going to die upon the cross.

And it's just before Jesus is going to die on the cross, I think it's in John 17, that he says to his disciples, he's going to go right from saying this into being captured, and he knows he's within hours

of being crucified, and he says, now is the Son of God, now is the Son of Man glorified.

[24 : 57] The glory of God is revealed in the crucifixion. The glory of God is revealed in the crucifixion of God, the Son of God, dying full of grace and truth, that when we put our faith and trust in him, the truth about God and the grace of God enters into us and changes us.

You see, it's very, very interesting. You know, I said that if every human being has this profound mixture of, not mixture, sometimes it's a mixture, but sometimes it's just pure, unadulterated darkness, and sometimes it's as close to unadulterated light as you can get, although with the fall, there's always a little bit of a darkness connected to it.

But if you think about it for a second, the true God can only reveal himself to a creature like you and me, who's both darkness and light, if he doesn't just reveal us, if he just tries to reveal truth, then the darkness is going to twist that truth.

He can't reveal truth without redeeming, without delivering. And that's why the God, the Son of God dying upon the cross is the most perfect moment of God revealing himself truly to us.

And he reveals himself at the moment of most profound grace. If human beings are both dark and light, there can be no revelation unless there is also redemption.

[26 : 19] And only the Christian gospel provides that. Only the Christian gospel provides that. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The grace and the glory of God is revealed in the crucifixion. Brothers and sisters, friends, this is a day to ponder, to remember, to reflect, to meditate upon this profound truth that the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

He died to save us. And when he saved us as Emmanuel, God with us, and he lives with us as Emmanuel. He lives with us at our best moments, our worst moments.

When he is our Savior and Lord, he never leaves us, he never forsakes us, he is God with us until he is God with us and we with him face to face in the new heaven and the new earth.

God is with you if you are in him. We'll close in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that the word became flesh and dwelt among us and that we know of his glory, the glory of the cross, that it is through the cross that grace and truth comes to us.

[27 : 41] We ask, Father, that the life and death and resurrection of Jesus would be ever more real and powerful to us and that, Father, in a world that worships power and its own glory, may we have a deep remembrance and appreciation of your willingness to become weak and poor that we might become strong and rich.

And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen.